

VZCZCXR09948

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RUEHLM RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHTI #0373 1301620
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 091620Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7081
INFO RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0758

UNCLAS TIRANA 000373

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [UN](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: ALBANIA: THE UN'S BRAIN GAIN PROGRAM -- TARGETED AT HIGHER EDUCATION

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Albania's higher education system has undergone major changes since the fall of communism. Reforming it has been a priority of every government since, though each has devoted varying levels of resources and effort toward improving this vital societal foundation. The brain drain phenomenon has strongly impacted academia in particular, a situation which must be addressed to secure qualified professors and researchers, improve Albania's nascent graduate studies programs, and recruit university professors, in order to prepare the next generation of young Albanians for the modern workforce. The GOA, in partnership with United Nations Development Program (UNDP), is in the midst of a two-year Brain Gain Program to help bring back well educated members of the diaspora. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The Brain Gain Program aims to close the current generational gap in the Albanian work force, where only a handful of educated workers in sectors such as finance, services, and education are aged 25 to 40. White collar professions are dominated by workers either close to retirement, raised under communist rule with the particular viewpoint that comes with this history, or fresh out of college with little life experience. The program is a tangible effort targeted to attract and maintain the best human capital between these two age groups.

¶3. (U) Launched in March 2006 and scheduled to end in September 2008, this joint GOA-UNDP project creates incentives and mechanisms to reverse the brain drain. One such incentive focuses on civil servants who have a master's degree or Ph.D. from foreign universities, offering them a bonus of up to \$300 USD per month on top of their paycheck.

¶4. (U) Academia is strongly targeted, to confront the current dearth of qualified professors, textbook authors, and academic researchers. The problem is particularly acute as it hinders the next generation from acquiring quality higher education in the western tradition. Since the fall of communism, Albanians who could find a way to finance their education at overseas universities did so, avoiding the lack of experienced professors and educational resources in their own country. This new program is designed to bring these individuals back.

¶5. (U) To assist those young Albanians who have acquired a foreign education, a practical implementation of the Brain Gain Program has been to facilitate local recognition of foreign university degrees. This process has long been an obstacle for many returning from abroad, as securing the official paperwork that recognizes their achievement has been a lengthy and bureaucratic process, sometimes taking years to complete, which necessitates various fees, official and "unofficial," to accomplish the task. With GOA recognition of their achievements at a foreign university, these young people may more quickly and easily enter the domestic workforce or local graduate programs.

¶6. COMMENT: As in many parts of the world, reversing the brain

drain is an important step in improving the Albanian talent pool for today's technology- and services-based global economy. The GOA's Brain Gain Program should assist in bringing back more qualified members of the diaspora. Although there has been little concrete progress so far, the GOA and UNDP continue to work to incentivize the most qualified and educated Albanians to return home, and we will continue to follow this program and any results which may come of it. END COMMENT.

WITHERS